



News from Congressman **Tom Lantos**

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LANTOS WARNS OF CLOSE TIES AND CASH-FOR-JUSTICE IN COLOMBIA'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH PARAMILITARIES

Fifty-five Members of Congress join Lantos in his letter to Colombian President

Washington, DC — Colombia should sever completely the lingering ties between its security forces and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA) wrote to Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez today.

Fifty-five other members of the House of Representatives signed the letter, which Lantos initiated. It also took issue with a proposed amnesty offer that would let known gross violators of human rights and drug traffickers walk out of prison, or even avoid incarceration altogether, by paying damages to victims.

Lantos, the Ranking Member of the House International Relations Committee and co-chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, commended Uribe and his administration for making a public commitment to end the remaining links between segments of Colombia's security forces and the right-wing paramilitaries. "But I remain troubled by credible reports of continuing close associations between these two groups," Lantos said. "We cannot condone any cooperation with designated terrorists, regardless of the combat pressures military commanders may face in the field."

"A zero-tolerance policy must be understood and felt from the top brass to the rookie infantryman," Lantos added. "This is why I sponsored a provision in the Foreign Relations Authorization bill that encourages the Colombian military to pursue paramilitary leaders aggressively and to detain them for prosecution." The House passed the foreign relations authorization, including the Lantos provision on Colombia, in July. The Senate is considering the legislation now as part of its deliberations on its own omnibus authorization bill.

"It seems incredible to me that with the lessons of truth-and-reconciliation processes in Latin America and across the globe as part of our collective experiences, high-level Colombian officials would seriously consider a slap on the wrist and a cashier's check as equitable substitutes for real and complete justice," Lantos said. "A more comprehensive and thorough accounting into the abuses committed by all the terrorist groups and their collaborators and supporters seems to me to be required."